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**MOVIE REVIEWS: LA DANSE: THE PARIS OPERA BALLET, PLANET 51, THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON**

Also, *The Messenger, That Evening Sun, Defamation* and more  
**L.A. WEEKLY FILM CRITICS**  
 Published on November 18, 2009 at 9:17pm

**BLOOD EQUITY** If you've already read Malcolm Gladwell's excellent recent New Yorker article on the disturbing physical and mental deterioration that awaits professional football players after their careers are over, you'll find next to nothing illuminating in this long-on-the-shelf advocacy documentary put together by producer Roman Phifer. A former lineman and current assistant coach, Phifer has organized Blood Equity as an emotional plea for the National Football League Players Association to improve their assistance to aging former players who helped to bring the NFL to prominence but were given little pay and a meager pension. It's a sad story and one that deserves to be better-known among fans, especially considering the alarming connections being drawn lately between playing football and permanent brain damage, but Blood Equity's simplistic approach and shoddy production values diminish the urgency of its content. The film's talking heads — mostly retired pros who sustained crippling injuries — grow monotonous, and there's zero interest in a deeper ethical debate about the NFL's ascendant popularity in relation to its celebration of violence. Gladwell, *60 Minutes* and other journalists have covered this complicated subject more poignantly and in much greater detail, which makes Blood Equity seem both insufficient and badly behind the curve. To wit, the film spends much of its running time decrying NFLPA Executive Director Gene Upshaw — without ever acknowledging that he died more than a year ago. (Sunset 5) (Tim Grierson)

**DEFAMATION** *Defamation*, Jewish Israeli director Yoav Shamir's cheerfully incendiary documentary about the modern face of anti-Semitism, begins with Shamir blundering, Michael Moore-style, through the New York offices of the Anti-Defamation League, where National Director Abe Foxman and his minions dutifully rout out a "spike" in anti-Semitic incidents, which includes office workers denied vacation for the High Holy Days and a policeman's racial slur overheard at a funeral. From there, it's off to Israel, where teens about to depart for a tour of the Polish concentration camps are briefed for their journey: "You will see that they do not like us." (Later, some of these same students are seen putting imagined anti-Jewish slurs into the mouths of some elderly Polish citizens.) At first, it seems Shamir (*Checkpoint*) may be indoctrinating us, too. But as he continues his world tour, his case — and the film — becomes more carefully nuanced, with evidence of overt hate crimes (a stabbing spree in a Moscow synagogue) juxtaposed against Foxman's Chicken Little hysteria, on the one hand, and The *Holocaust Industry* author Norman Finkelstein's virulent anti-Zionism on the other. Does anti-Semitism exist, or is it a construct of America's powerful, pro-Israel lobby? Are Jewish fears of a second Holocaust justified or merely a product of the same fearmongering that gives rise to all forms of extremism? Is *Venezuela really* the second most anti-Semitic country in the world after *Iran*? Like most good documentaries, *Defamation* poses more questions than it purports to answer, before arriving at the mildly reductive postulation that what's past is past. (*Music Hall; Town Center 5*)

**GO LA DANSE: THE PARIS OPERA BALLET** Frederick Wiseman's magnificent *La Danse: The Paris Opera Ballet* offers a portrait of suppleness and agility — not just that of the dancers' bodies but also of the august institution of the title. Like all of his documentaries, *La Danse* forgoes voice-over and identifying intertitles, allowing for spectators' full immersion into the action within the walls of the Palais Garnier, the 19th-century, neo-Baroque opera house where the company rehearses and performs, while also demanding that we pay closer attention, with none of nonfiction film's usual cues to guide us. Roughly two-thirds of *La Danse* is devoted to rehearsal and performance, shot in deeply satisfying long takes of gorgeous young men and women starting, stopping, listening, questioning, repeating, perfecting. The rest is behind the scenes, and as Wiseman

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